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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [ASEC](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET: MARCH 17 UPDATE ON PROTESTS

REF: A. BEIJING 998

[1](#)B. BEIJING 983
[1](#)C. BEIJING 982
[1](#)D. BEIJING 981
[1](#)E. BEIJING 980
[1](#)F. BEIJING 979
[1](#)G. BEIJING 976
[1](#)H. BEIJING 975
[1](#)I. BEIJING 973

Classified By: Deputy Political Section Chief Ben Moeling. Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) This cable draws heavily on sources and information obtained by officers and staff at Consulate General Chengdu, and has been coordinated with the Consul General in Chengdu.

Summary

[1](#)2. (S) Summary: Contacts of Embassy Beijing and ConGen Chengdu report that the situation in Lhasa on March 17 is calmer but still tense, with a heavy military presence but halting signs of a return to normal life. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) authorities have given a deadline of midnight on March 17 for those involved in the protests to surrender in exchange for leniency. Protests and violence have spread outside of Tibet, particularly to Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Gansu provinces. Security is heavy in Chengdu, with large numbers of extra People's Armed Police (PAP) at the Consulate General and a security cordon around Tibet Town in Chengdu. Embassy officers are trying to make their way into Tibetan areas of Gansu or Qinghai but have been stopped by police roadblocks. Chinese officials, meanwhile, have told visiting Senator Cantwell and Professional Staff Members from the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees that the Chinese Government is acting with restraint and that the violence is the fault of the Dalai Lama. End Summary.

Situation in Lhasa

[1](#)3. (S) ConGen Chengdu staff spoke by cell phone at 0815 March 17 to an Amcit NGO employee staying at the Flora Hotel behind the Lhasa Mosque near the Barkhor area. She was told by hotel staff that she would be arrested if she went out without a police escort. She said she heard sporadic gunfire during the night, but further away than before, more toward the "outskirts of town." At around 0700 March 17 she saw smoke and heard "some kind of activity" near the Jokhang Temple. She reported "lots of broken windows" on adjacent buildings, as well as a burned car and lots of debris in the street. She counted about 100 "soldiers" standing in front of the hotel. One end of the street was blocked by the military, and all shops were closed, with no civilians present on the street. At 0920, Chengdu staff spoke to

another Amcit employee of a coffee shop near the Barkhor. She said things seemed quiet, but that there had been "a lot of tension in the air last night." She reported having seen Tibetans on rooftops with stones and other objects, apparently ready to throw down on people below. (Note: A reporter for the Economist described the same phenomenon, but he added the detail that those with rocks were responding to rumors that angry Hui Muslims were coming to seek revenge for attacks on Huis by Tibetans.)

14. (C) At 1020, ConGen Chengdu staff spoke with a different Amcit coffee shop owner, who said that, after a calm morning, "things have changed." A detachment of 25-30 "military guys" had fired "three or four shots" nearby. He said the shots were fired horizontally and noted that the sound of their guns was unusually low, "like pop guns." He speculated that they had been using rubber bullets.

15. (S/NF) Another contact, communicating via cell phone text message, advised that "military vehicles and armored cars are everywhere in Lhasa and Linzhi" (seat of Linzhi Prefecture, in the southeast TAR, and site of a large military base not far from the Indian border). The message claimed 120 people had been arrested and 20 vehicles burned but did not specify a location. The same source reported later in the afternoon that the soldiers from Lanzhou and Linzhi were going house-to-house in Tibetan areas of Lhasa, questioning residents, confiscating cameras and cell phones and cutting land telephone lines inside residences.

16. (C) Late in the afternoon of March 17, the coffee shop owner called again. He said that main roads are open in Lhasa, at least intermittently, but "checkpoints are everywhere, and lots of military are out on the roads." However, many things were returning to normal; he mentioned

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that he was passing municipal workers who were out watering flowers.

17. (C) His second shop, located on Lingkor North Road, had been slightly damaged. One window had been smashed in, and money stolen from the register, but there was no other interior damage. One window had three or four bullet holes through it. He said he was able to collect the bullet fragments on the floor of his shop. The police were in the area investigating the damage to his and other businesses, and when he told them that there were bullet holes in the glass, they denied that there had been any gunfire (even after seeing the bullet fragments), saying "you don't know what you're talking about." He reported widespread damage to buildings and business stretching all the way from the Barkhor to Jiangsu Road and the Second Ring Road.

Situation Outside Tibet

18. (C) The unrest spread outside of Lhasa soon after it began there, contacts told Embassy Beijing. A reporter and photographer in Lanzhou, Gansu, told Beijing PolOff that the police responded to unrest in Xiahe, Gansu on Saturday, March 15. Police checkpoints on the road to Xiahe were in place by Saturday the 15th, drivers and western reporters in Lanzhou told other Beijing Embassy officers. By Monday, March 17, when Embassy staff reached Gansu, police had placed checkpoints and roadblocks on the highways and had closed the entire Tibetan area of Gansu to foreigners. A Gansu Foreign Affairs Office staffer who was on duty at a police checkpoint on the highway to Xiahe told the Embassy Officers that the area was "closed to foreigners due to police activity." She would not elaborate beyond that explanation.

19. (S/NF) Violence was reported in Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province on March 16 and 17. ConGen Chengdu's FSN reported that on the afternoon of March 16 a contact reported that "a few monks" had been killed at Gerthe Monastery in the county

seat of Aba County, in northern Sichuan's Aba Prefecture. (Gerthe Monastery is a large monastery affiliated with the Dalai Lama's Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its abbot is in exile in India. A large PSB facility is located immediately adjacent to the Monastery and a military base is about a half-mile away.) In the town of Aba a mob had attacked and damaged stores. The contact who sent the text about military vehicles in Lhasa in para 5 above also wrote that nine people have died in Aba, and that a demonstration around mid-day had already been suppressed.

¶10. (S/NF) At 1330 ConGen Chengdu's Tibetan FSN heard from a contact that a new protest by monks and lay people was beginning in Aba Prefecture, in Tangkor Township of Derge County (possibly same as the town of Kangtang in Mandarin). Students also started protesting March 16 in Barkham County (Mandarin: Ma'erkang), the seat of Aba Prefecture, and in Aba Prefecture's Hongyuan County, and those protests are continuing. No reports concerning injuries or fatalities have been received yet.

¶11. (C) Embassy Beijing officers traveling in Gansu heard a rumor of a protest at a Tibetan monastery outside of Xining City, the capital of Qinghai Province, but could not confirm it. Several other sources said Qinghai is calm.

¶12. (C) ConGen Chengdu's FSN spoke by phone with a monk in Yunnan's Zhongdian (Tibetan Gyalthang, aka Shangri-la) County in Derge Prefecture. The monk reported that many of his counterparts are "angry" and wanted to stage a protest, but that a heavy security presence prevented them from doing so.

¶13. (C) An Amcit law student and Anthropology Ph.D. candidate in Beijing, who is studying Tibetan and who has traveled through Tibet and Tibetan areas of Gansu and Yunnan, said he is surprised the riots have spread outside Tibet, especially to Xiahe. He described the spread of protests and violence as "very, very significant" and said it indicates "widespread tension and discontent among ethnic Tibetans."

¶14. (C) ConGen Chengdu also reported a much more substantial security presence in Chengdu on March 17. "Tibet Town," an area of the city with a large concentration of Tibetans, was sealed off by police the morning of March 17. ConGen Chengdu also heard about a planned demonstration of Tibetan students at Southwest Nationalities University in Chengdu (in Tibet town) as well as Tibetans in Tibet town. The security presence at the Consulate General was also increased significantly. An additional six uniformed PSB guards with side arms were put out front late on March 14, and by March 17 they added an additional 100 PAP in camouflage uniforms (vice the usual formal green dress uniforms). A rover PAP squad of six in camouflage uniforms began doing regular

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rounds along the Consulate perimeter. Four to six uniformed PAP in helmets set up behind the Consulate.

¶15. (C) ConGen Chengdu received no official information about these security changes, or of any threat to the Consulate. The RSO LES staff was told by one of the PAP that the security is just a precaution and that no demonstrations were expected at the U.S. Consulate General. ConGen Chengdu also observed extra police presence along the expressways in Chengdu.

¶16. (C) Beijing PolOffs noted the absence from today's National People's Congress (NPC) plenary session of the Gansu, Sichuan and Qinghai Province Party Secretaries. The Tibet Party Secretary has been absent from the NPC since March 16; his return to Tibet was greeted in the press with great fanfare as he inspected the police and noted the supposed risk he had decided to run to his own health by flying straight back to Lhasa without acclimatizing.

Chinese Officials: We are Acting with Restraint, but the

¶17. (C) Meeting with Senate Foreign Relations Committee Professional Staff Member Frank Januzzi and Senate Armed Services Committee Professional Staff Member Evelyn Farkas March 17, Assistant Foreign Minister He Yafei stated that "the situation in Tibet is out of control" and declared that no country, including the United States, would tolerate such riots. "Innocent policemen" were among the ten people who have been killed, AFM He said. (Note: even official Chinese media have allowed their acknowledgment of the death toll to climb to 13.) China has the responsibility to restore order, he said. There are "clear indications" that the Dalai Lama is behind the riots, AFM He said, and expressed hope that "Washington would exercise restraint in public statements on the matter."

¶18. (SBU) Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) raised Tibet with NPC Vice Chairman Sheng Huaren on Sunday evening, March 16. Sheng said Tibet is a very sensitive issue and the Dalai Lama is a political leader, not just a religious leader. The Dalai Lama "talks of harmony but is pushing separatism," Sheng said. Sheng recited the list of atrocities that the Chinese Government has been providing to reporters and the diplomatic community, including arson, looting, beating, killing of innocent people and injuring of police. He said the police "tried not to fight back, and the result was great damage." Sheng also said "about 10" people were killed. "The perpetrators are not for human rights," he said. If the Chinese Government tolerates this behavior, it would be "totally neglecting" the life and property of innocent people. The "Dalai Lama clique," he concluded, "chose this time to coincide with the NPC and Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress and because it is the Olympic year." Senator Cantwell reiterated that Americans want to see a non-violent resolution and are looking for the Chinese Government to show restraint. Sheng said that the Chinese Government wants to protect people but it will punish law violators in accordance with the law.

U.S. Embassy Officers in the Field

¶19. (C) U.S. Embassy Beijing officers left Beijing for Lanzhou, Gansu Province March 16 to try to get to the town of Xiahe, the reported site of protests, in an ethnic Tibetan area of Gansu to start obtaining firsthand information. They arrived in Lanzhou the evening of March 16 and went to Northwest Ethnic Minority University in Lanzhou the morning of March 17. The Consulate General in Chengdu had received information that Tibetan students there were planning a protest, which would be the first expansion of protests to a provincial capital outside Tibet. EmbOffs found a very heavy uniformed and plainclothes police presence at the university but saw no protest while they were there.

¶20. (C) EmbOffs hired a vehicle to take them south of Lanzhou to the Tibetan town of Xiahe. The driver said it would be impossible to go there, so they asked to be taken to a nearby town. The driver agreed to try. Approximately 60 kilometers south of Lanzhou, they were stopped at a police roadblock near a toll booth as discussed in para 8. EmbOffs have moved on to Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. As of 2100 March 17, they were on a bus on the road between Lanzhou and Xining moving very slowly behind a long convoy of PLA trucks.

RANDT